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AUTHOR McGee, Glenn W.
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ABSTRACT

What the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) test actually tests and the consequences of these tests for funding decisions were studied with a random sample of 100 school districts in the Cook County suburbs of Chicago. Eighth-grade IGAP scores for reading were obtained from the state report card, a document prepared by each school district under legislative mandate. Per pupil expenditure, attendance rate, mobility rate, average teacher salary, percentage of low income students, and the ratio of the number of students in the district to the number of teachers in the district were studied for significant correlations. Partial correlations were then used to isolate particular relationships, and analysis of variance was used to provide information for explaining variations in scores. Results support the conclusion that the statewide test in Illinois, the IGAP, measures more than student achievement. The bell-shaped curve of eighth-grade reading scores and the high and highly significant intercorrelations among all IGAP test results strongly imply the IGAP is a test of ability. Multiple regression shows that nearly three-fourths of the variation on IGAP test scores is due to context factors and not academic achievement. As the IGAP test exists, it is to a large measure a stronger indicator of poverty and mobility rate than of achievement. To a lesser extent, it is an indicator of the ratio of students to teachers, attendance rates, and cost variables. Implications for policy formation are discussed. An appendix presents two examples of test content--sixth and eighth grade reading tests--and associated questions. (Contains 12 tables and 20 references.) (SLD)

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# WHAT STATE TESTS TEST

A Paper Prepared for the

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Annual Meeting

Chicago, Illinois

by

Glenn W. McGee

Superintendent of Schools

Deerfield Public Schools District 109

Deerfield, Illinois

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## A Pressing Problem for Illinois

In a 1991 paper, John Bowers predicted that the public would have an increasing acceptance of and dependence on state testing and the local use of standardized achievement test data. Six years later, even he may have been surprised at the extent to which his prophecy had been fulfilled. In Illinois, the "acceptance of and dependence on" the results of the statewide Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) test, known in all of the state's 906 school districts as the IGAPs, guide policy decisions at the state and local level. In fact, to improve education in Illinois this year the state legislature may well overhaul the school funding formula and state tax structure--the success of which which will be measured by student performance on the IGAP.

Last month the author sat on the floor of the Illinois House of Representatives listening to fourteen groups ranging from the Urban League to the Taxpayer's Federation make school funding proposals to the entire membership of the House. For three hours the lawmakers listened quietly (at least far more quietly than they usually are) as speaker after speaker appealed for additional state funding. Although variations in funding plans and foundation levels for the state formula existed, there was general agreement on four principles:

- schools need more state tax money to provide an adequate education;
- disparities in per pupil expenses need to be reduced;
- the source of revenue should be through a state tax increase (primarily on income, sales, and gaming);
- reliance on local property taxes (the source of most school funding revenue) should be decreased.

Conspicuously missing from the list was agreement on an outcome measure. A few groups acknowledged the need for accountability but others dodged the issue.

As might be expected from elected officials who had been asked to raise the income tax--thus clearly putting their jobs at risk--the presenters received polite applause but the raised eyebrows and body language could have filled volumes. Not until the question and answer session did the key issue surface. Speaking for most of his colleagues, Representative Parke asked, "For the most part, all morning the presenters kept asking for more money. As if the only answer to the dilemma is more money. You know, sort of saying, 'Show me the money; show me the money'! Well we've shown the money to public education year after year. Year after year. And I just want to ask from anybody, if we give the education community another billion dollars as one of the proposals are, what can the taxpayers and what can the Members of the General Assembly expect next year or the following year to get for that money? Somebody come on up and tell us what we can expect will happen with the additional money you keep asking for. Anybody, please come up and tell us what we are going to get for the money . . . are we going to get an improvement in test scores?"

*No one could give him a straight answer.*

Representative Parke continued, "You have to understand the frustration that we as Legislators have is that if, in fact, reading scores have gone down, and I know that that's true . . . we have pumped more money almost every year in the last thirteen years I've been in the Legislature and the scores are coming down."

Everyone in the chamber, presenters included, realized that for more money schools will need to produce results. In Illinois, these results are the IGAP test scores, period. Every year the results of every school district are published in newspapers throughout the state. The Chicago dailies run charts of all the scores, and the local papers of many, if not most small towns, list the scores of the school districts in their readership area. For example, the editor of the author's local

paper, the *Deerfield Review*, delights in running side by side comparisons of the two neighboring school district and does his best to stir up controversy by noting the differences in an achievement score at a particular grade level, per pupil spending, or the average teacher salary. Reading these newspaper articles, the casual observer--or typical taxpayer--cannot help but share the perception and belief of the General Assembly that IGAP tests are the only measure of academic achievement and performance in the state that matters. So despite the persistent calls of NCTM, NCTE and other national organizations for "authentic assessments," " alternative assessments," "curriculum based assessments" and the like, in Illinois the policy makers at state and local levels as well as the general public see the IGAP as the one test that counts.

During the next few months in Springfield, intense debate will be waged on the issue of school funding. Although the end result is not entirely predictable, the prevailing thinking on both sides of the aisle and on both sides of Interstate 80 is that the state legislature needs to address issues of adequacy and equity in school through some sweeping tax changes and perhaps educational reforms including longer school years, required retraining of teachers, and elimination of the tenure system. With additional funding, the legislature and the public will expect and may well require that IGAP scores improve. Any test which potentially impacts public policy so powerfully merits careful attention.

Given what we know about state testing in other states and about NAEP testing, the lawmakers' perceptions of what IGAP test results measure are inaccurate. Like its counterparts, the IGAP may not be an accurate measure of achievement. It may well measure much more. Despite the findings of the effective school studies, variation in achievement is explained by more than academic learning time, teaching methodology, curriculum content and school

goals. As Jones (1988) notes in studying mathematics achievement on statewide tests in Mississippi, "Achievement tests are highly intercorrelated. This suggests that a general intellectual and/or motivational factor is playing the major role in achievement test results." The fact that national standardized achievement test results data are normally distributed confirms that these tests may be primarily measures of aptitude. Fraser's (1987, p. 220)) study of NAEP science scores showed that ability was the highest correlate with achievement, r=+.48 for nine year olds, r=+.30 for thirteen year olds and r=+.42 for seventeen year olds (all significant at less than .01).

Studies of statewide achievement testing, as well as research at district levels and the national level, indicate variation in achievement scores may have more to do with context variables than with student achievement. Returning to Jones' (1988) work, he reports significant correlations between per capita income and eighth grade math scores were (r=+.30), enrollment of nonwhite students (r=-.38), the poverty level of the students (r=-.36), and the number of students on free lunch (r=-.54). In the upper grades, "the drop out rate is clearly and negatively related to mathematics achievement scores." (p.5) Commenting on the results of his regression statistics, he states, "In fact, economic factors (e.g. percent on Free Lunch) are often better predictors of mathematics achievement than are previous mathematics and achievement scores."(p. 4) He found that economic factors and the educational environment were strong predictors of achievement with the number of students receiving free lunch and the teacher's salary accounting for about one fourth of the variation in third grade math scores.

A study of achievement in Utah (Fox et al, 1990) found that SES, Race and School Size were all variable related to academic achievement. The New Orleans Board of Education (1993) study found that attendance was positively correlated with

test results while the number of students suspended or expelled were negatively correlated with them. Moreover, significant negative correlations were also found for the number of students qualifying for free lunch (a measure of poverty) and the number of Chapter One students. Oneal and her colleagues (1984) also found that mobility rate and attendance rate in Albuquerque schools were strongly related to achievement. Using NAEP data, several studies have described the impact of background variables related to the social context and the family (Fraser et al, 1987; Bryant, Claser, and Hansen, 1994; and U.S. Department of Education). Other studies have found a host of variables besides those our legislators and public equate with achievement. These include practice on the test format (Kulik et al 1984); the students' perception of the use of test results and the importance of the test (Karmas and Karmas, 1984); student test anxiety (Plass and Hill 1986); student "test wiseness" (Ducate 1982); local expenditures--not state expenditures--and the community interaction of more populous areas (McNamara and Deeton, 1985).

Probably the most comprehensive study of a state testing program is the work by Gordon Bobbet and his associates (1992) who examined the relationship between student outcomes and information on the Tennessee school report cards. The measure of achievement (Mean Student Outcome) was significantly positively correlated with student attendance (r=.41), average teacher salary (r=.44), county per capita income (r=.31), percentage of "Career Ladder" teachers (r=.31) and expenditures per pupil, (r=.22). Significant negative correlations existed with the number of students on free or reduced lunch (r=-.49) and oversized classes (r=-.30). His regression analysis indicated that 26.5% of the variation in achievement was explained by the "money cluster" (per capita income, per capita expenses and teacher salary) and the school variables. Students attendance alone accounted for 11% of the variation. In is closing paragraphs, Bobbet also notes, "Assessing what students

know and are able to do is a problem...the findings are only as good as the test results. There is great debate about the value of the present tests--both their content and format, and there is great demand for new and different assessments. If the test results used to form the dependent variable in this study were not measuring the right things or were not measuring them validly and reliably, all other finding are of little value." (p.23.)

To be sure, other background variables are likely to influence IGAP results. Given the complexity of the task involved on the IGAP reading tests (students read two long passages and answer multiple choice questions about the passage--each question, however, may have one, two or three correct answers (see appendix for sample questions from practice tests distributed by the Illinois State Board of Education)), administrators believe, and can show, that extensive practice with the test format can dramatically improve scores from one year to the next. Some teachers also have learned a formula for teaching writing using the state rubric. Because the writing test involves actually writing two compositions, the teachers believe, and their students' test scores indicate, that when they teach their students the test format, their scores will improve. In November the three major Chicago daily papers devoted front page coverage to a three year decline in reading test results. Theories about the drop were advanced by a host of educators from the State Superintendent of Schools to classroom teachers. Some blamed the fact that the tests "did not engage students", while others pointed the finger at teaching "whole language" instead of phonics (Wallace, 1996) in the early grades. A decline in parents reading with children, more children with special needs and problems in the classroom, and the amount of time children spend in front of television or engaged in other "non-literacy" activities were also cited as contributing factors. Student motivation and attitude (Brodt, 1996) were particular targets of teachers

who believed that because the tests "don't count" students do not try to succeed. Though none of these explanations has been corroborated through research, they are widely held public and professional perceptions. It is very clear that the IGAP matters.

Given what is known about the perceived importance of the IGAP and the relationship between background variables and test results from other states, public policy makers should question whether the IGAP is a sound measure of achievement. They should also question what the IGAP measures in addition to achievement. With this information, any additional funds could be directed to where they would have the most impact on student achievement. This study will be of assistance to our legislators and public in clarifying what the IGAP tests actually test and the consequences for funding decisions.

## Methodology

For this study the author used a random sample of 100 school districts in the Cook County suburbs of Chicago and in the "collar counties" surrounding Cook. This sample was used for several reasons: 1) it contains many of the poorest and most of the wealthiest districts of the state; 2) these districts have operated under a tax cap (the property tax limitation act) for between two and five years while other districts have not had this restriction on revenue until this current year; 3) the student population in this area represents more than half the students in Illinois and 4) they have a similar (though hardly identical) cost of living (according to the McMahon Index, cost differences in the standard of living approach 100% throughout the state; thus any teacher salary or per capita expense comparisons between collar counties and downstate districts is meaningless unless adjustment factors are used). The single school district of Chicago was eliminated from the sample because of its size and the different rules and regulations for its governance.

Eighth grade IGAP scores for reading was the dependent variable. This test was chosen because the eighth grade year is the culminating grade of a student's elementary education experience, and the core area of reading is the public's perception--and the Illinois legislature's--of a child's education. Also, reading scores have receive much media attention in Illinois as they have been declining the last three years, and a pilot study of 1993 data (McGee, 1994) indicated that because eighth grade reading, mathematics and writing tests as well as the seventh grade science and social studies tests were so highly intercorrelated using any of the three as a dependent variable would illustrate the same relationships between context variables and outcome measures.

The IGAP mathematics, social studies and science tests are traditional formats, though the mathematics involves more application type questions than computation algorithms. They all involve multiple choice questions with one right answer. All three tests involve reading comprehension and interpretation of charts and graphs. In fact, in an earlier study, the author (McGee, 1994) gave a sample of twelve IGAP questions to fifty educators and found that less than 30% could correctly identify from which tests the questions were taken. The writing test consists of students actually writing a persuasive, narrative, or expository essay on a particular topic. As noted earlier, the reading test is unique and a quite difficult task. Students read two lengthy passages and answer several multiple choice questions. Each question may have one, two, or three right answers. When making presentations to educators and the public, the author gives a sample sixth or eighth grade IGAP reading passage (see Appendix). Rarely does the majority of the audience get a perfect score.

Independent variables were all obtained from the state report card, which is a a document the legislature mandated be presented by each district at a public School

Board meeting, given to all parents, and made available to any interested parties. The variables used were per pupil expenditure (COST), attendance rate (ATT), mobility rate (MOB) which is a measure of students moving into and out of a school district during the course of a year, average teacher salary (ATS), the percentage of low income students (POV) , and the ratio of the number of students in the district to the number of teachers in the district (S:T).

The data was first examined for significant correlations. Partial correlations were then used to isolate particular relationships. Finally, analysis of variance was used to provide information for explaining variations in scores.

## Results

### Correlations

To confirm the results of the earlier pilot study (McGee, 1994), the author first examined the intercorrelations in IGAP tests. Table 1 shows the results. As the reader can see, eighth grade reading correlations are all highly significant ($p<.001$) with eighth grade mathematics ($r=+.85$) and writing ($r=+.77$) and seventh grade social studies ($r=+.89$) and science ($r=+.89$). It is also highly correlated with reading tests at third ($r=+.83$) and sixth grades ($r=+.87$). This data would indicate that using any one of the five outcome measures at seventh or eighth grade (or for that matter, the reading scores at third grade or sixth grade) as a dependent variable in the study would most likely yield similar relationships between the outcome and whatever independent variables were studies. One finding not reflected in this table, but worthy of mention is that the intercorrelation between science and social studies tests indicate they are almost two versions of the same test. At both fourth grade and seventh grade, the intercorrelation between these two tests is a highly significant ($p < .001$) +.94!

Turning to the relationships between the independent variables and eighth grade reading scores in Table 2, one sees highly significant correlations ($p<.001$) with all of them. The strongest positive correlates are attendance rate ($r=+.61$), average teacher salary ($r=+.49$), and per pupil expenditure ($r=+.40$). The strongest negative correlates are poverty ($r=-.79$), mobility rate ($r=-.74$), and ratio of children to teaching staff ($r=-.39$).

As even the casual reader might suspect, and as any practitioner knows, some of these independent variables are closely related to one another. As a labor intensive business with salaries and benefits accounting for between 70-80% of expenses in nearly every school district in Illinois, one would expect to see a close relation between COST and ATS and COST and S:T. One might also expect a close relationship between POV and ATT. These predictions are confirmed by the data in Table 3 which shows all intercorrelations between independent variables. In addition to those intuitive relationships noted above, the reader should note that mobility rate is highly intercorrelated with poverty rate and also significantly, though less highly, correlated with attendance. Districts with the highest poverty rate, then, also face the challenge of having the highest percentage of students moving in or out of their schools each year and lower attendance rates. The impact on the education of students as measured by an eighth grade reading score is already predictable: these schools will have substantially lower scores. The analysis of variance below will show just how strongly these three variables impact test scores.

Table 1

Correlations of All IGAP Test Scores with IGAP Eighth Grade Reading Scores

| Test | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|
| Mathematics Grade 8 | **0.85** |
| Writing Grade 8 | **0.77** |
| Social Studies Grade 7 | **0.89** |
| Science Grade 7 | **0.89** |
| Reading Grade 6 | **0.87** |
| Mathematics Grade 6 | **0.84** |
| Writing Grade 6 | **0.67** |
| Social Studies Grade 4 | **0.8** |
| Science Grade 4 | **0.82** |
| Reading Grade 3 | **0.83** |
| Mathematics Grade 3 | **0.72** |
| Writing Grade 3 | **0.63** |

*Note: All correlations in **boldface** are significant to the $p < .001$ level*

Table 2

Correlations of Independent Variables with Dependent Variables

| Dependent Variable | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|
| Attendance Rate (ATT) | **0.61** |
| Average Teacher Salary (ATS) | **0.49** |
| Per Pupil Expenditure (COST) | **0.4** |
| Ratio of Students to Teachers (S:T) | **-0.37** |
| Mobility Rate (MOB) | **-0.74** |
| Percentage of Low Income Students (POV) | **-0.79** |

*Note: Correlations in **boldface** are significant to the $p < .001$ level*

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Table 3

Intercorrelations of Independent Variables

| Dependent Variable | ATT | ATS | COST | S:T | MOB | POV |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attendance Rate (ATT) | **1** | | | | | |
| Average Teacher Salary (ATS) | *0.24* | **1** | | | | |
| Per Pupil Expenditure (COST) | 0.14 | **0.72** | **1** | | | |
| Ratio of Students to Teachers (S:T) | -0.17 | **-0.42** | **-0.76** | **1** | | |
| Mobility Rate (MOB) | **-0.49** | *-0.25* | *-0.24* | *0.34* | **1** | |
| Percentage of Low Income Students (POV) | **-0.71** | *-0.21* | -0.15 | 0.15 | **0.78** | **1** |

*Note: Correlations in **boldface** are significant to the $p < .001$ level*
*Correlations in italics are significant to the $p < .05$*

Partial Correlations

Because of the high intercorrelations, a careful look at partial correlations controlling for specific variables yields a clearer understanding of the relationships between the context of the district and the outcomes. Table 4 shows that when one controls for poverty, the expenditure variables COST, S:T, and ATS are still correlated with achievement while ATT is not and the impact of MOB is greatly reduced (from r=-.74 to r=-.42). These results indicated that regardless of the poverty level, expenditure variables have a relationship with achievement. One can also infer that the impact of POV on achievement is powerful, a result which is well documented in previous research. Table 5 illustrates that when mobility and attendance are controlled, however, the correlation between achievement and poverty is lessened (from r =-.79 to r=-.34), though still significant, while the relationship of cost remains about the same (r=+.40 to r=+.37).

Controlling for all cost variables (Table 6), the relationship between reading achievement and ATT, MOB and POV is about the same as if cost is not controlled.



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This information suggests that dollars alone will not lead to improved achievement scores, an implication which will be explored further in the next section.

Finally, Table 7 shows that when two variables which districts can exert at least some control, ATT and S:T are controlled, the adverse impact of POV and MOB on reading achievement are just marginally reduced. These results depict the uphill battle districts with high poverty and mobility rates face. Like some dense mass at the center of a black hole, high poverty and high mobility exert *almost* enough gravitational force to pull achievement scores down no matter how much effort districts exert. As results below indicate, however, improving the attendance rate and adding staff can loosen the bonds and have some impact on test scores, but alone they are not enough to escape the restraints of poverty and high mobility.

Table 4

Partial Correlations Controlling for Percentage of Low Income Students (POV)

| Dependent Variable | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|
| Attendance Rate (ATT) | 0.13 |
| Average Teacher Salary (ATS) | **0.42** |
| Per Pupil Expenditure (COST) | **0.47** |
| Ratio of Students to Teachers (S:T) | **-0.42** |
| Mobility Rate (MOB) | **-0.33** |

*Note: Correlations in boldface are significant to the p< .001 level*
*Other correlations are not significant*

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Table 5

Partial Correlations Controlling for Attendance Rate (ATT) and Mobility Rate (MOB)

| Dependent Variable | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|
| Percentage of Low Income Students (POV) | **-0.34** |
| Per Pupil Expenditure (COST) | **0.37** |
| Ratio of Students to Teachers (S:T) | *-0.2* |
| Average Teachers' Salary (ATS) | **0.4** |

*Note: Correlations in **boldface** are significant to the p<.001 level*
*Correlations in italics are significant to the p < .05 level*

Table 6

Partial Correlations Controlling for Cost Variables (COST, ATS, S:T)

| Dependent Variable | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|
| Attendance Rate (ATT) | **0.58** |
| Mobility Rate (MOB) | **-0.72** |
| Percentage of Low Income Students (POV) | **-0.79** |

*Note: Correlations in **boldface** are significant to the p<.001 level*

Table 7

Partial Correlations Controlling for Attendance Rate (ATT) and Ratio of Students to Teachers (S:T)

| Dependent Variable | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|
| Mobility Rate (MOB) | **-0.61** |
| Per pupil expenditure (COST) | *0.24* |
| Average Teacher Salary (ATS) | *0.32* |
| Percentage of Low Income Students (POV) | **-0.67** |

*Note: Correlations in boldface are significant to the p<.001 level*
*Correlations in italics are significant to the p < .05 level*

Analysis of Variance

Before turning to a regression analysis, the data showing the means and ranges (Table 8) merits attention as it shows the incredible diversity in suburban Illinois. Contrary to stereotypes of suburbia, where all students have the foundation for a fine education and the North Shore suburbs use tax dollars to (as one Senator said) "carpet their swimming pools," a great variation in all variables actually exist in this sample.

For the variables with the strongest relationship with achievement, the percentage of low income students (POV) ranged from zero to 96.9% and the mobility rate (MOB) from 2.4 to 45.1 %. The expenditure variables of per pupil expenditures (COST), ranging from $3066 per pupil to $9869 per pupil; average teacher salary (ATS) ranging from $27402 to $53291; and ratio of students to teachers (S:T) ranging from 13.3 to 29.6 reveals tremendous discrepancies in resources and a great diversity of context conditions in school districts. Though the attendance rate seemed to have less variation, from 91.3 to 97.4 with a mean of 95.4 and standard deviation of .85, further analysis will show the impact of just one percentage point.

Table 8

Means and Range of Variables

| Variable | Mean | SD | Low | High |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eighth Grade Reading IGAP Score | 259.77 | 34.16 | 149 | 339 |
| Attendance Rate (ATT) | 95.40% | 0.85% | 91.30% | 97.40% |
| Average Teacher Salary (ATS) | $40,408.00 | $6,036.39 | $27,403.00 | $53,291.00 |
| Per Pupil Expenditure (COST) | $5,876.90 | $1,509.00 | $3,066.00 | $9,869.00 |
| Mobility Rate (MOB) | 14.14% | 8.39% | 2.40% | 45.10% |
| Percentage of Low Income Students (POV) | 14.35% | 17.46% | 0.00% | 96.90% |
| Ratio of Students to Teachers (S:T) | 19.1 | 3.19 | 13.3 | 29.6 |

As for the dependent variable, the eighth grade IGAP reading scores ranged from 149 to 339 on a scale of 0 to 500. The mean was 259.77 with a standard deviation of 149. Moreover, this reading achievement data almost fits a bell curve. In fact, when six outliers are dropped, the curve is very closely bell shaped, with a kurtosis of .256, though somewhat negatively (-.582) skewed. Both mathematics and writing scores also reflected wide variation, with math ranging from 183 to 404 with a mean of 310.03 and SD of 44.59 and writing ranging from 20.4 to 29.4 with a mean of 25.72 and standard deviation of 1.69.

Given the diversity of districts in the sample, the author compared the mean reading achievement scores of the top and bottom quartiles of selected independent variables (Table 9). The results show that though significant, the mean eighth grade reading scores for districts in the bottom quartile of per pupil expenditure (243.50) and those in the top quartile (274.58) are much closer than those in the bottom quartile--less than 95.1--of attendance rate (226.9) than those in the upper quartile--greater than 95.9-- (280.89). One percentage point improvement in attendance rate, then, could be enough to move a district from the bottom to the top quartile, a move which would appear to have a tremendous potential impact on IGAP scores.

In fact, Table 10 illustrates when the entire sample is divided into two subsamples at the median for per pupil expenditures, there is no significant correlation between cost and achievement for either of the subsamples. Using two similar subsamples for attendance (one above the median and one below), for districts with an attendance rate below 95.6, the correlation is r=+.16 (not significant) whereas the correlation for those with an attendance rate above 95.6 has a correlation of r=+.53.

Table 9

Mean Eighth Grade IGAP Reading Scores of Districts in the Top and Bottom Quartile of Selected Variables

| Dependent Variable | Bottom Quartile | Top Quartile |
|---|---|---|
| Attendance Rate (ATT) (bottom < 95.1; top > 95.9) | 226.9 | 280.89 |
| Average Teacher Salary (ATS) (bottom < $35,500; top > 44,800) | 233.69 | 279.85 |
| Per Pupil Expenditure (COST) (bottom < $4691; top > $7006) | 243.5 | 274.58 |
| Ratio of Students to Teachers (S:T) (bottom > 21.2; top < 17) | 238.54 | 272.58 |
| Mobility Rate (MOB) (bottom > 17.8; top < 7.8) | 227.68 | 285.79 |
| Percentage of Low Income Students (POV) (bottom > 19.55; top < 2.9) | 222.24 | 282.48 |

Note: All means are significantly different at $p < .01$

Table 10

Correlation Coefficients for Subsamples Above and Below the Median

| Dependent Variable | Below Median | Above Median |
|---|---|---|
| Attendance Rate (ATT) (above > 95.6; below < 95.6) | 0.53 | 0.16 |
| Significance | yes; $p < .001$ | no; $p = .303$ |
| Per Pupil Expenditure (COST) (above > $5578; below < $5578) | 0.08 | 0.16 |
| Significance | no; $p = .577$ | no; $p = .268$ |

The final step in the analysis of variance was to conduct a multiple regression analysis. Leaving out the variable of average teacher salary because of its collinearity with cost, and entering COST, ATT, MOB, POV, AND S:T as independent variables, the adjusted $R^2$ statistic is 0.723.

Table 11

Regression Summary

| Dependent Variable | $R^2$ | Adj $R^2$ | Independent Variable | Beta | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IGAP Reading Grade Eight | .737 | .723 | POV | -.461 | -4.171 | .0001 |
| | | | MOB | -.263 | -2.803 | .0062 |
| | | | COST | .248 | +3.031 | .0032 |
| | | | ATT | .123 | +1.605 | .1118 |
| | | | S:T | -.003 | -0.039 | .9690 |

Approximately 72% of the variance in the IGAP eighth grade reading achievement scores is explained by these context variables! The stepwise regression analysis, shows that of these five, per pupil expenditure, mobility and poverty account for most of the variation. Given the high intercorrelations among some of the independent variables, the author expected to find some collinearity, and in examining the eigen values found modest collinearity among three of the variables.

As a result of this collinearity and knowing that district level policy decisions and state funding of education could not begin to address the problems of poverty and mobility, the author chose two variables ATT and S:T for a second multiple regression analysis. Improving attendance rate is within control of a school district, and additional state funding for districts to add teaching staff--not to add to the salaries of the existing teaching staff--remain a possibility during the current Illinois



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legislative session. Would these two efforts bear fruit? Will they improve IGAP scores? Table 12 answers the question.

Table 12

Regression Summary for Attendance and Student:Teacher Ratio

| Dependent Variable | $R^2$ | Adj $R^2$ | Independent Variable | Beta | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IGAP Reading Grade Eight | .448 | .437 | ATT | +.565 | +7.33 | .0000 |
| | | | S:T | -.275 | -3.57 | .0006 |

Attendance and ratio of students to teachers accounts for 44% of the variation in IGAP scores for the sample! Moreover, the eigen values indicate no collinearity between these variables. When poverty and mobility are included, the impact these two have on achievement declines, but the results indicate that districts might be well advised to consider measures they can control.

## Conclusions

The results of this study support the author's suspicion that the statewide test in Illinois, the IGAP, measures more than student achievement. The bell shaped curve of eighth grade reading scores and the high and highly significant intercorrelations between all IGAP test results strongly imply that the IGAP is a test of ability, a finding consistent with Fraser's (1987) study of NAEP science scores. Moreover, the multiple regression analysis shows that nearly three-fourths of the variation in IGAP test scores is due to context factors and not academic achievement. Though teaching methods, materials, teacher expertise and the like may directly influence student learning, the effects of these inputs are likely to have



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minimal impact on IGAP results compared to context variables. ***The IGAP tests as they exist, then, to a large measure are stronger indicators of poverty and mobility rate than of achievement. To a lesser extent, the tests are indicators of the ratio of students to teacher, attendance rates, and cost variables.***

The high intercorrelations between the expenditure variables, COST, ATS, and T:S and the close relationship between ATT, MOB, and POV have important implications for those who desire to improve IGAP scores. Just adding more money to schools will not necessarily result in improvement. The analysis of variance, however, untangles the relationship and indicates that unless new dollars are directed to adding staff, one cannot expect increases in per pupil expenditures alone to increase test scores. The fact that the percentage of low income students is closely related to attendance and mobility informs district that some of the deleterious effects of poverty potentially can be somewhat ameliorated if mobility rate is reduced and attendance rate is increased. Of the independent variables, state and district administrators will realistically be able to address attendance. If a goal is to improve test scores, the battle to get students to school will be worth fighting.

The analysis of variance shows the effects of the cavernous gaps on the background variables. Recalling the tremendous disparity in eighth grade reading scores between the districts in the top quarter and those in the bottom quarter of all the context variables, effort and funds should be directed to "leveling up," that is moving the districts in the bottom quarter closer to the top quarter. Ironically, while debate rages on the House floor regarding the appropriate per pupil expenditure, or "foundation level" cost for an adequate education, there is not even idle conversation about a foundation level for attendance rate, the number of teachers per student, mobility rate and the like. The data clearly reveal that a foundation level for attendance rate or the number of teachers per student would



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have more impact on achievement than a foundation level for per pupil expenditure alone.

## What Next?

To be sure, several other variables exist which impact IGAP scores. Test wiseness, student motivation, and practice with the test format have all been shown to be related to standardized achievement scores. Although these variables are probably collinear to a certain extent with attendance, mobility rate and perhaps the ratio of students to teachers, they merit further study. If one listens to the teachers, as policy makers would be well advised to do, IGAP scores would improve if the students had more stake in being successful on them and had ample opportunity to practice the tests. Research is needed to validate this contention.

A second research agenda should investigate threshold levels of variables which can be controlled at the state and district level: attendance rate and the number of teachers per student. This study should alert policy makers to the possibility of a "foundation level" for these variables. If threshold levels exist, any additional funding would likely be more effectively used than just by increasing general state aid.

## Implications for Policy Makers

At the district level, the results clearly express a need for administrators to foster regular attendance and use whatever new funding becomes available to add staff. Many, if not all, administrators already realize the importance of these variables. Incentive programs for improving attendance in poverty areas are common and have been promoted by professional sports teams--the Chicago Bulls and the Chicago White Sox. Likewise, in an appendix to a detailed proposal for changing the structure of state funding made by an unlikely but powerful coalition of the Illinois Association of School Boards, Illinois Association of School



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Administrators, and the two state teacher unions, the IFT and IEA (as well as the PTO and the Illinois School of Business Officials), administrators' responses to the question of what they would do with more money were listed. Despite the fears of the legislature, no one recommended paying teachers more money, and most said they would add staff members.

At the level of the State Board of Education, the IGAP test itself and the procedures for administering it could be restructured to reduce time students spend on tests. Two weeks ago students in grades three, six and eight spent several hours completing the IGAP reading, writing and mathematics tests over a period of five days. Students in fourth and seventh grade spent somewhat less time taking the social studies and science tests. The results of this study suggest that testing time could be reduced by giving the IGAP tests at fewer grade levels. The number of hours spent on tests could probably be halved by combining portions of the individual tests into one more lengthy test.

Finally, as the reader returns to the floor of the House, he or she could now confidently answer Representative Parke's question. Until the poverty level declines--and along with it the mobility rate--he will not see major improvement in IGAP scores no matter how much money is poured into the school system. Scores will not rise just by adding money to increase current per pupil expenditures. Representative Parke and his colleagues will see some incremental increases in test scores, however, if new funds are directed to, and can be successfully use for, increasing student attendance and adding teachers--especially for school districts where the attendance rate and student to teacher ratio falls below the mean.

A decision on school funding will probably be made prior to July 1, 1997. As a school superintendent, the author fervently hopes that the legislators will be alerted to the need to make informed decisions guided by research.

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APPENDIX

Sixth Grade Practice IGAP Reading Test: An Army of Two

Eighth Grade Practice IGAP Reading Test: The Right Kind of House

## THE ARMY OF TWO

by
PATRICIA EDWARDS CLYNE

Becky Bates shielded her blue eyes as she gazed below across the harbor. In the distance the town of Scituate, Massachusetts, lay sparkling in the September sun.

"I still don't understand why we couldn't go along too!" Becky declared.

"Someone had to stay behind to help Mother," her sister Abigail pointed out.

"But Mother said she didn't need any help!" Becky stamped her foot, though it made no sound in the coarse sand of Cedar Point.

"Well, what if Father doesn't return from town before sunset? Someone must be here to start the beacon in the lighthouse," Abigail reminded her. "Then there's always the chance that the British..."

Both girls stared again at the quiet waters of Scituate Harbor. There was no wreckage there now, but they would never forget what it had looked like on June 11, 1814. That was the terrible day three months ago when the British had raided Scituate. By the time the Redcoats sailed away, the harbor had been turned into an inferno of burning ships.

"The British wouldn't dare come back," Becky stated boldly. "Not since our soldiers have been stationed here at the lighthouse."

"But the soldiers aren't here today," Abigail was quick to say. "And neither is Father."

An uneasy feeling gripped Becky. Abigail was right. The American troops, restless after months of idleness, had begun to spend their days across the harbor in Scituate. The girls' father was unhappy over the careless attitude of the regiment, but there was little he could do about it. He was only the lighthouse keeper and had no authority over the soldiers.

Becky sighed as she turned back to the lighthouse. "Well, we might as well go see if there isn't some way we can help Mother, after all."

The long, narrow arm of land that was called Cedar Point curved around to protect the harbor of Scituate. Because of this, the girls did not get a glimpse of the blue-gray waters of the Atlantic Ocean until they had almost reached the lighthouse.

"A frigate! It's a British frigate!"

Abigail's cry made Becky's heart lurch, and she strained her eyes to identify the vessel fast approaching the harbor. Suddenly the wind caught the flag at the peak of the mast, unfurling it to full length. It was the fearsome British Union Jack!

Legs churning in the sand, the two girls raced for the lighthouse. "Mother! Mother, it's the British. They're coming again!"

By the time they reached the door, Mrs. Bates had opened it, and the girls hurried inside."We must alert the

regiment!" Mrs. Bates cried. "We must warn the people!" Quickly untying her apron, she took her bonnet from a peg near the door, and the three of them hurried outside.

But it was too late. The British frigate had already dropped anchor and launched two barges full of soldiers.

"There is no way to warn the people in Scituate now," Mrs. Bates said gloomily. "The British would see us if we tried to row the dory across the harbor. And it would take too long to go the roundabout way by land. I think it best that we hide ourselves among the cedars and sand dunes."

So saying, she began to walk away from the lighthouse. Then sensing that her two daughters were not following, she turned abruptly, an impatient look on her face.

Abigail was tugging at her sister's sleeve. But Becky only stood there, staring at the oncoming barges. "Hide ourselves," she was murmuring. "So the British won't see us."

Then she shouted, "That's it! The British can't see us among the dunes! Come on, Abigail!"

Abigail could only stare in amazement as Becky darted back into the lighthouse. Then Abigail turned to call, "Go ahead, Mother. I'll fetch Becky."

When Abigail stepped over the threshold Becky was struggling to lift a heavy drum the American soldiers had left behind.

"Help me, Abigail," she pleaded. "But first get the fife over there. Papa taught me how to play 'Yankee Doodle.' Remember?"

Abigail shook her head in bewildered agitation. "Of course I remember," she said. "But what has 'Yankee Doodle' got to do with this? As for the drum, there's not time to save it. Come on, Becky. The British will be landing at any minute. We must get to the dunes."

"Indeed we must," Becky agreed. "But the drum and the fife must go too!"
Fully convinced that her older sister had lost her senses from fright, Abigail decided to humor her. "All right, Becky. If you insist on having the drum and fife, we'll take them along. Only hurry!"

When the girls arrived behind the sand dune where their mother waited, Becky breathlessly explained what she had in mind. She paused only to hand the drumsticks to Abigail before she put the wooden fife to her lips.



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Meanwhile, the British soldiers stirred restlessly in the barges, their eyes intent on the rocky beach that sloped up to the lighthouse. Not a word was said as they nervously clutched their guns.

Suddenly the silence was shattered by the staccato tapping of a drum. The Redcoats jerked to attention, straining to make out the pattern of the drumbeats.

Just as the soldiers turned apprehensive eyes to the officer in charge, the shrill voice of a fife joined the thump of the drum. It took only a few notes for them to recognize the detested American tune "Yankee Doodle."

The British commander aboard the frigate also heard the warning of the fife and drum. He had counted on surprising the Americans, for his landing party was not a large one. But now there would be no surprise. Nor was there any way of telling how many Americans might be waiting for them behind the dunes.

Within seconds, the commander's decision was made. He signaled the barges to return to the frigate. Behind a sand dune on shore, a dark head popped up, and a pair of blue eyes grew wide with delight.

"Hurrah!" came a triumphant shout.

But the British did not hear it. With the landing party safely back on board, they had hoisted sail and were fast making for the open Atlantic. Nor did they spot the two young girls, joyously dancing around a dark red drum on shore.

Only later did the British commander of the frigate La Hogue find out that he had been frightened away by a pair of heroic teen-age sisters, who would forever be proudly remembered as the "Army of Two."

**Mapping Passages**

Before writing questions for any passage, item writers map the text structure and content. This procedure identifies the important information in the text and the causal relationships among text segments or episodes. Mapping helps item writers focus questions on important aspects of the text. The students do not see the map. It is a tool for test constructors. It can also be very useful for teachers to map texts as they develop questions.

Please make sure you have read the passage *before* you review the map.

This is an episodic map of "The Army of Two." Following the identification of the theme, main idea, problem, characters, and setting, the episodes of the story are outlined using the following system:

**N** = Need or goal of the characters' intended actions
**P** = Plan or means of attaining a goal
**A** = Characters' attempt to achieve the goal
**O** = Result of characters' actions

**Theme:** Sometimes quick thinking can outwit the careful planning of a larger, more experienced foe.

**Main Idea:** Two young girls save their town from an enemy attack by pretending to be something they're not.

**Problem:** Two girls and their mother are stranded without help and must save themselves and their town from attack by the British.

**Resolution:** The girls' plan is a success and the British are tricked into retreating.

**Characters:** Becky: spirited, resourceful
Abigail: protective, concerned for other's welfare
Crew of the British Frigate: small in number.

**Setting:** A secluded lighthouse point on the coast of Massachusetts during the War of 1812.

**Episode 1** - The Enemy Arrives

N - To protect the community from British attack.
P - Assign American troops to stand watch and protect the harbor.
A - American troops stand watch for months with no sign of British troops.
O1 - Troops become lazy--spend time away from assigned watch stations.
O2 - No one observes arrival of British frigate but Abigail and Becky.

**Episode 2** - Warn Others

N - To warn the town of the frigate's arrival.
P - Go by rowboat or overland around the dunes.
A - Non-action—not enough time.
O - Girls and mother are the only three who know the frigate is in the cove.

**Episode 3** - Hiding

N - To hide from the British.
P - Go to the cedars and sand dunes.
A - Mother goes ahead; Abigail goes back to get Becky.
O - Mother hides; Abigail learns of Becky's plan.

**Episode 4** - Tricking the British

N - To mislead the British.
P - Make them think the American troops are marching to attack.
A - Play fife and drum out of sight of the British.
O - British, being small in number, flee fearing attack by a larger force.

After the passages are mapped, they are re-evaluated using the maps. Sometimes mapping will reveal problems related to structure or richness which had gone unnoticed. When this happens, the passage is dropped. If no

problems are found, item development begins. Typically, topic familiarity items are written first. Students complete each topic familiarity section before they read the accompanying passage. A description of the scoring procedures is presented in the Appendix.

### Topic Familiarity

The topic familiarity section evaluates students' abilities to make predictions and to find out how much students know about a topic before they read. First, students are presented with a brief overview of the text. The type of text is identified, then they are presented with an overview of the passage and are asked to answer two questions. The first question is a prediction question about what might be in the text. The second question is a general knowledge question about the topic the students will read about. This activity is similar to the prediction activities many teachers use with students before they read a selection.

### Sample Topic Familiarity Items

"You are going to read a story about two girls who try to keep their Massachusetts village from being destroyed by the British during the War of 1812. Think about what might happen, how the girls might feel and what they might do."

1. How might the girls feel in a situation like this?

* A. Scared
* B. Proud
* C. Ill-equipped
D. Superior
E. Indifferent

2. How did the British most likely travel to Massachusetts?

A. By train
* B. By ship
C. By plane
D. On foot
E. On horseback

Students' scores on the topic familiarity section are calculated in the same way they are calculated for the constructing meaning items. The scoring procedures are presented in the Appendix.

Topic familiarity scores are *not* reported as outcome scores. Performance on this section is reported only as it relates to school and district constructing meaning scores. The state's distribution of topic familiarity scores is divided into three groups: the lowest 25 percent, the middle 50 percent and the top 25 percent. The average constructing meaning score is reported for each of these groups. At the school and district levels, the score report indicates the percentage of students in the school and district with topic familiarity scores in each of the three statewide groups. The average constructing meaning scores for these groups of students are also reported. This reporting system lets schools and districts see how well students in their school or district *use* their topic familiarity to help them construct meaning.

In the first three years of the reading assessment, statewide results support the relationship between topic familiarity and constructing meaning. Students with higher levels of topic familiarity receive higher constructing meaning scores. In 1990, third grade students with topic familiarity scores in the lower 25 percent statewide had an average constructing meaning scale score of 214. Students with topic familiarity scores in the middle 50 percent had an average constructing meaning scale score of 264, and the students with scores in the upper 25 percent had an average constructing meaning scale score of 288. The same relationship was observed at grades six, eight, and eleven in 1990, as well as in the two previous years of the reading assessment.

### Sample Constructing Meaning Items

After reading the passage, students answer 15 constructing meaning questions. Questions may have one, two, or three correct answers. Students are encouraged to refer to the text when selecting their responses. The use of longer passages makes it possible to ask a variety of types of questions. The types of questions included on the Illinois reading assessment are chosen because they reflect the kinds of questions frequently asked by teachers during discussions. The assessment includes six types of items:

**Vocabulary items**
evaluate students' ability to understand the meanings of key words and phrases contained in the passage, using the context provided by the text.

**Characterization items**
evaluate students' ability to understand characters' key traits and motives using information from various points in the text.

**Explicit items**
evaluate students' ability to identify important information specifically stated in the text.

**Implicit items**
require students to make inferences within a sentence, between adjoining sentences, or within and across paragraphs.

**Application items**
require students to apply information from the text to new situations or contexts.

**Author's purpose/craft/bias**
assess students' ability to identify the author's reason(s) for using a particular writing convention, the message(s) the author intended to communicate, or the point of view or bias of the author.

Research shows that the level of a reader's topic familiarity will influence the response given to a question. Questions can, and often do, have more than one right answer. In the case where a question has more than one correct response, students receive partial credit for each correct response and full credit when they identify all of the correct responses. All correct responses within an item are weighted equally. Because item point totals are reduced by incorrect choices, it is important that students evaluate each choice for an item before selecting it.

The constructing meaning scores make up the *outcome measure* of the reading assessment. These are the scores which make up the state, district, and school scale scores. The Illinois scale has a range of 1 to 500. For the first year of the assessment, the statewide mean was set at 250 and the standard deviation of student scores was set at 100. In subsequent assessments, these values shift in response to student performance.

As you review the items, notice that the questions focus students' attention on important information and require students to make inferences, apply knowledge, and integrate their existing knowledge with information from the text.

In the following examples, correct responses are indicated by the placement of an asterisk to the left of each correct response. There can be one, two or three correct answers.

**Vocabulary**

In the story, it said that Abigail shook her head at Becky in *bewildered* agitation. How might someone who is *bewildered* act?

A. Confused
B. In charge
C. They might make a mistake.
D. They could be hungry.
E. They might misbehave.

**Characterization**

From what you've read, which of the following words can be used to describe Becky?

A. Nervous
B. Resourceful
C. Quick-thinking
D. Uncooperative
E. Clever

**Explicit**

Why were the American troops spending so much time in Scituate?

A. They were bored and restless.
B. Abigail's father was angry with them.
C. The waters of Scituate Harbor had been quiet for months.
D. The British had ordered them to stay in town.
E. They knew they outnumbered the British troops.



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**Implicit**

Why were the girls the first to notice the British frigate?

A. The lighthouse beacon was not lit.
B. The frigate was hidden from sight by sand dunes.
C. The frigate had come during the night.
D. The frigate was very small.
E. Their mother had gone into Scituate for the day.

Why didn't Becky run to the dunes when her mother told her?

A. She was too frightened to move.
B. She was trying to remember how to play "Yankee Doodle Dandy."
C. She was busy thinking of a plan.
D. She couldn't remember where she'd put the drum the American soldiers had left behind.
E. She knew her family might be safe if she could fool the British.

What made Abigail think Becky had lost her mind?

A. She did not know Becky had a plan.
B. She could not understand why they needed a drum.
C. She could not figure out why "Yankee Doodle" was so important.
D. She did not think they would be safe in the dunes.
E. She knew Becky was easily frightened.

**Application**

How might the story have been different if Abigail and Becky's father had had some authority over the American troops?

A. The British frigate would not have gotten as close to the shore without being noticed.
B. The beacon on the lighthouse would have warned everyone that the British were coming.
C. There would not have been as many American soldiers in Scituate.
D. The American troops would not have been allowed to let Becky and Abigail keep the drum.
E. Abigail and Becky would not have been all alone with their mother on Cedar Point.

**Author's Craft/Purpose**

What do you think that the author Patricia Edwards Clyne wanted you to learn from reading "The Army of Two"?

A. There is safety in large numbers.
B. Keep things that you may need in the future in a safe place.
C. Lighthouses and sand dunes are dangerous places to live.
D. It takes more than strength to win a battle.
E. Careful thinking can sometimes make things possible that seem impossible.

Following the completion of 15 constructing meaning items, students answer two reading strategies questions.

**Sample Reading Strategies Items**

Students are presented with two problem scenarios based on the passage they have just read. There are two types of scenarios: problem solving and centrality. The problem-solving scenario presents students with a situation in

which they do not understand a specific element of the text and asks them which of the five possible strategies would be helpful in solving the problem. The centrality scenario presents students with a situation in which they must identify and/or distinguish between important and unimportant ideas in the text. Students must indicate which of the five alternative "summaries" are acceptable. This section is scored the same as the constructing meaning section. Students receive partial or full credit depending on their selected responses. The results of this section give schools an indication of how aware their students are of different strategies and how sensitive students are to the usefulness of different strategies in different situations.

**Sample Problem-Solving Scenario**

"Imagine that you don't understand what it means when it says "...The British frigate had already dropped anchor and launched two barges full of soldiers..." Which of these things would help you understand this part of the story?"

*A. Go on reading but look for things to help you understand it.
*B. Reread the part of the story where Abigail spots the British frigate.
C. Reread all of the words you don't know.
D. Reread the part of the story where the soldiers hear "Yankee Doodle" being played.
E. Look up the meaning of the words in the title if you don't know them.

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**Sample Centrality Scenario**

"You have just read 'The Army of Two.' However, some of your classmates have not read it. Which of the following would help your classmates understand what the story is mainly about?"

A. "It is about The Army of Two."
B. "It is about a girl named Becky who wants to play a drum. Her younger sister Abigail thinks she is crazy and gives her a fife. She finds the drum and they both march around the yard playing 'Yankee Doodle.' Their mother cannot stand the noise and hides in the sand dunes."
*C. "It is about two girls who discover that their town is about to be attacked by a British ship. They cannot go for help, so the oldest girl comes up with a plan. They hide from sight and play an American marching tune to fool the British into thinking American soldiers are nearby. The British leave without attacking."
D. "It's about two girls who live on the coast of Massachusetts near a town called Scituate. They live in a lighthouse with their mother and father. There are sand dunes all around their home and cedar trees grow nearby."
*E. "It is about how no matter how young you are, if you think carefully, you can probably fool someone who is bigger and stronger than you are if you just use the element of surprise."

Like the topic familiarity results, reading strategies results are *not* reported as outcome scores. Performance on this section is reported only as it relates to school and district constructing meaning scores. The state's distribution of reading strategies scores is divided into three groups, the lowest 25 percent, the middle 50 percent and the top 25 percent and reported in the same format as topic

familiarity results. This reporting system lets schools and districts see how well students in their school or district *use* their knowledge of reading strategies to help them construct meaning.

In the first three years of the reading assessment, statewide results support the theoretical relationship between reading strategies and constructing meaning. Students with higher levels of reading strategies receive higher constructing meaning scores. In 1990, eleventh grade students with reading strategies scores in the lower 25 percent of reading strategies scores statewide had an average constructing meaning scale score of 187. Students with reading strategies scores in the middle 50 percent had an average constructing meaning scale score of 252, while the upper 25 percent had an average constructing meaning scale score of 308. The same relationship may be observed at grades three, six, and eight in 1990, as well as the two previous years of reading assessment.

### Sample Literacy Experiences

The literacy experiences portion of the assessment surveys the frequency of students' literacy experiences in four reading and writing areas: in-school activities, out-of-school activities, strategies used while reading and writing, and the different uses of reading and writing. Students at each grade respond to approximately ten literacy survey items.

These questions about students' reading and writing habits and attitudes provide a fairly clear picture of uses of and attitudes toward literacy. This helps teachers and administrators get a clearer picture of how students perceive their instructional programs and practices. This information provides a basis upon which administrators and teachers may make changes they feel are helpful in improving their curriculum and instruction.

How often do you read a book just for fun?
A. Never or almost never
B. 1 or 2 times each month
C. Once a week
D. 2-4 times each week
E. Every day or almost every day

How often do you share your writing with classmates?
A. Never or almost never
B. 1 or 2 times each month
C. Once a week
D. 2-4 times each week
E. Every day or almost every day

How often do you tell a friend about a book you liked?
A. Never or almost never
B. 1 or 2 times each month
C. Once a week
D. 2-4 times each week
E. Every day or almost every day

How often do you read something for homework?
A. Never or almost never
B. 1 or 2 times each month
C. Once a week
D. 2-4 times each week
E. Every day or almost every day

The following sections describe ways in which you can prepare your students for this assessment. There are two distinct "senses" in which you and your students can get ready for this test. First, there are "preview" activities you can do during the week or two before the test to make sure that your students understand the tasks they will be asked to perform, the directions they will have to follow, and the types of items they will encounter. Second, and more important, teachers at all grade levels, not just grades three, six, eight and eleven, can do things all year long to help students become effective readers.

## HELPING YOUR STUDENTS PREPARE FOR THE ILLINOIS READING ASSESSMENT

### Previewing the Test

Improved performance on this test will result from instruction designed to help students become more strategic, independent readers. Nonetheless, shortly before the actual administration of the assessment, you should preview the test with the students to make sure they understand the nature of the passages, the tasks, the item formats, and the directions.

To facilitate this preview, the Illinois State Board of Education has released sample tests for grades three, six, eight and eleven. All samples are actual tests which were used in previous assessments. These samples have been revised to reflect the minor modifications made to the topic familiarity and reading strategies sections described in this booklet and implemented in the April 1991 assessment.

You may obtain copies of the sample tests from the Illinois State Board of Education or from your local Educational Service Center. Illinois educators are free to reproduce these samples for their own classroom or building use. One narrative and one expository sample are available at all four grade levels.

A six-step procedure is described below. It is designed to acquaint teachers with the samples *before* they introduce their students to the sample tests.

**Step 1: Finish reading this booklet before previewing the sample test with your students.**
This document provides an overview and rationale for the assessment. It explains and exemplifies the sections of the assessment--topic familiarity, constructing meaning, reading strategies and literacy experiences.

**Step 2: Take the sample test yourself before previewing it with your students.**
This will help you anticipate any potential problems for your students. Pay attention to the thought processes that you use to answer each type of item. (You may even want to take some notes.) If you do, you will be able to share your insights with your students when you go over the test with them.

**Step 3: Walk your students through a sample test. Do this in two parts.**
First, preview the sections. Don't give the test; don't even have the students try the items yet. Familiarize them with the format and directions, then go back to the beginning and work through each section in a guided practice mode. This is the place for you to:

- model the strategies you used when you took the test;
- anticipate and explain any potential problems you found;
- encourage students to try items on their own, defend answers, and discuss differences;
- point out the similarities between what happens in a lively classroom discussion of a story or an article and what it takes to do well on this test; and
- review the test-taking tips provided in this section following step 6.

**Step 4: Summarize and clarify.**
Go over each section and have students try to summarize what is expected of them. Stop to clarify any misunderstandings that surface.

**Step 5: Draw students' attention to the similarity between sample test items and classroom discussions of text.**
Use classroom discussions which follow the preview of the test to show students the similarities between the components of the sample test and the elements of classroom discussions. Specifically, remind them of the similarities between prereading discussions and the topic familiarity section. Point out the numerous occurrences of questions with more than one right answer in both pre- and post-reading discussions. It will also be helpful to show students that the reading strategies questions are similar to classroom discussions which focus on how and where they found answers to questions and how they constructed summaries of what they read.

**Step 6: Remind students about the preview and practice they have completed.**
Just prior to administering the actual reading test, remind students that the test they are about to take is similar to those they previewed earlier.

### Tips for Effective Test Preparation

This section provides guidelines and tips to use to help students prepare for the test. The guidelines are based upon successful strategies reported by Illinois teachers and administrators. The tips for students are clearly marked for easy identification.



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**Test-Taking Tip #1:** All items on this test, with the exception of the literacy survey, may have one, two or three correct answers. For each question you must evaluate five possible answers. It is important to remember to read every answer choice carefully.

The best model to use in explaining the logic of this test is a classroom discussion. In a typical classroom discussion, several answers for a given question are evaluated; furthermore, for certain questions more than one of these answers will be acceptable (or correct).

Some specific strategies will benefit students when they encounter the items. First, they should be encouraged to read through all five choices before they make any decisions. They should be cautioned to avoid the temptation to stop evaluating choices once they have found one good answer. This is a strategy, albeit counterproductive, that many students apply to most multiple-choice tests. One strategy which may be helpful with this test is to try to eliminate the two least plausible responses before evaluating the remaining three. Since there will never be more than three correct answers to a question, this elimination strategy, if applied thoughtfully and consistently, will help students identify correct responses.

**Test-Taking Tip #2: Topic Familiarity:** When completing the topic familiarity section, keep the topic of the passage in mind while answering the questions.

It is important for students to understand that this section helps them focus their thinking, similar to discussions they might have with their teachers before they read a story or a chapter as a class assignment. Students should not go back to this section to change an answer after reading the passage.

Do not "coach" students on specific topics prior to the test. Because topic familiarity scores are not reported as outcomes, there is no advantage in attempting to raise scores artificially on this section. In fact, this section loses its potential diagnostic usefulness to a school when coaching on specific topics occurs. The point of including this section in the test is twofold: (1) to help schools explain constructing meaning scores and (2) to demonstrate instructional strategies that help students realize they should use what they know to help them understand and that they should use what they understand to increase what they know

**Test-Taking Tip #3: Constructing Meaning:** Read through the text once before answering any constructing meaning questions; reread the text as necessary to evaluate possible answers.

School and district outcomes are based on this section of the test. Remember, just like the other sections, the constructing meaning section of the test is built upon a model of good classroom discussion. For each question, students must evaluate five possible answers. For some questions, as many as three answers may be correct.

Because the passages on which the questions are based are authentic pieces of text, they require the same sort of reading strategies, evaluations, and inferences that your students apply to normal reading. Students can expect to engage in a range of strategies—reading the text from beginning to end, skimming to look for main points, rereading for clarification, and reflecting on the entire text. Some questions can be answered by looking back at a single location in the text; others require students to locate clues from different text locations; still others require students to apply ideas from the text to new situations or problems so that flexibility in question-answering strategies is rewarded.

Also, students should be advised to refer to the text whenever they wish. For whatever reasons, many students have the idea that it is unfair to look back at the text when answering test questions. For this test, with the likelihood of more than one correct answer coming from more than one part of the text, looking back is highly advised.

**Test-Taking Tip #4: Reading Strategies:** All five answer choices, or "possible solutions," should be evaluated before answers are selected. It is also a good idea to refer back to the passage to clarify uncertainties or misunderstandings.

This section of the test focuses upon students' awareness of two important aspects of self-

evaluation and monitoring: (1) clarifying, or fixing-up, misunderstandings or ambiguities they might encounter while reading or studying and (2) evaluating the "centrality" of summaries, notes, or themes for selections they have read. Like the topic familiarity section, this section is not part of any outcome score on which schools or districts might be compared, so coaching students on this particular format is likely to render data from this section less helpful to a school or a district interested in curricular improvement. It is more advantageous, in the long run, for you to focus your efforts on helping students become more strategic readers than on artificially inflating their scores on this particular assessment. Nonetheless, it is important that students become familiar enough with the format and purpose of this section.

### Developing Strategic Readers

The previous section dealt with the issue of what you can do to make certain that students will be able to handle the tasks and format of the assessment. This section turns to the more critical issue of what schools can do within the reading curriculum to help students become strategic readers.

Articles in *The Reading Teacher* and the *Journal of Reading* in the last five years support the widespread commitment of reading educators and researchers to an interactive model of reading and to the goal of developing strategic readers. An even more telling index of this commitment is evident in the most recent editions of basal reading programs, all of which promote the development of open-ended discussions and flexible reading strategies applied to authentic texts of varying types. What this means is that the resources necessary to help students become strategic readers are readily available to all schools. Indeed, the relatively high scores on the first three years of the assessment in reading suggest that many teachers are already teaching their students to read strategically.

However, there is great variability in student and school level scores across the state. For example, in 1990, at grade six, student scores ranged from a low of 17 to a high of 483. School scores at grade six ranged from a low of 93 to a high of 390. Likewise, at grade eight, student scores ranged from 45 to 486, and school scores ranged from 107 to 374. This wide range of scores suggests that there is clearly need for improvement.

### Suggested Learning Activities

To help teachers emphasize strategic reading in their day-to-day lessons, a list of suggested teaching and learning activities drawn from recent journal articles, professional books, professional presentations and conferences is presented. In addition, Illinois educators were surveyed to obtain their ideas about methods they have developed as a part of the preparation of their students for the assessment. Finally, we have interviewed teachers and students about test formats and tasks included on the assessment. The numbers which follow each activity refer to recommended readings at the end of this document. Refer to these articles for a more thorough discussion of the suggested learning activities.

**1. Prior to reading, allow students to use their knowledge of both topic and type or style of text to predict what they will encounter during reading.**
Prediction activities accomplish several goals. By revealing to you how much your students know about a topic, they indicate how much support you may have to provide to aid comprehension. These activities also help students approach what is new to them (in the text) from the perspective of what they already know. Prediction activities also help students learn that they can get valuable input from their peers. [8, 12, 21, 37, 39, 41, 42, 45, 53, 58]

**2. Help students learn how to use their knowledge of text structure to uncover authors' notions of importance.**
The way an author organizes information in a textbook chapter or the way a mystery writer puts together a "whodunit" reveals what the author thinks is important or worthy of attention. There is considerable evidence that good readers rely on text structure to judge importance and that all readers can learn how to use their knowledge of text structure to aid them in comprehension. [6, 18, 43, 46, 56, 65, 66, 67]



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**3. Have students work in groups to map and organize whole texts or sections of texts.**

A good strategy for learning about how authors organize texts and how the text structure often reflects the relationships among the ideas (e.g., A comes before B because A caused B) is to work with students to build group and/or individual visual "maps" of selections. Flow charts, tables, story maps, cognitive webs, and semantic maps all represent variations on the visual mapping theme. [4, 5, 6, 13, 18, 30, 54, 65, 66]

**4. Use a diversity of question types to guide discussions about the selections students read.**

The comprehension of a selection must focus as much on the relationships among ideas as on the ideas themselves. A strict diet of factual, literal questions will never promote the kind of integration of ideas characteristic of the strategic reader. A good line of questions will promote an understanding of how ideas or events are linked to one another and how those ideas and events are also linked to ideas from other selections or from the readers' own experiences. Literal questions are useful to a degree that they support inferences, evaluations, and applications. [2, 13, 15, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 33, 35, 38, 47, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 60, 69, 71]

**5. Encourage a diversity of responses during discussions. Students need to learn that a single question can promote diverse thinking.**

This is especially true of questions that focus on explaining, evaluating, or applying ideas, but it is often true of so-called factual, literal questions. Students need to learn that it is not always just a question of being right or wrong, but rather a question of generating a response that is appropriate to the task. They also need to learn that there is often more than one way to come up with right answers. [1, 2, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 35, 36, 38, 43, 47, 50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 60, 63, 71]

**6. Encourage students to share the cognitive strategies that they use to generate answers and overcome reading roadblocks.**

One of the problems that poor readers have is that they possess few strategies for clarifying misunderstandings to make sense of the text. An important resource for the troubled reader, in addition to a teacher who is willing to make his or her thinking public, are peers who can likewise share the secrets of their cognitive successes. Such group problem-solving activities also show students that they can learn from one another. [7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 19, 23, 24, 28, 32, 34, 36, 40, 42, 43, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 67, 70]

**7. In discussions and assignments, encourage application of information by asking questions that require students to relate what they have just read to experiences in their lives and to other things they have read.**

Just as a reading lesson begins by invoking students' relevant knowledge, so it can end by encouraging students to think about how the new knowledge and insights they have gained from reading have changed their knowledge base. Put differently, students should be challenged to reflect upon how what they know influences what they comprehend and how what they comprehend changes what they know. [17, 33, 37, 42, 45, 54, 56, 57, 58, 66]

**8. Have students work together to complete skill or strategy assignments such as producing summaries, theme statements, or notes for studying.**

Students and teachers can learn from one another by sharing strategies for answering questions and overcoming reading roadblocks. They can also learn from one another by completing assignments in groups. What the interactive "groups" provide that is not easily achieved in independent assignments is an "evaluative" perspective. For example, when several students have contributed alternative summaries to be compared or when each student has contributed an idea for a group summary, then the whole group must focus on evaluating and revising the contributions. Ironically, the best way to promote self-evaluation may be in collaborative activities. [1, 2, 7, 16, 18, 19, 26, 28, 32, 34, 36, 37, 40, 42, 46, 48, 49, 50, 54, 63, 66]

**9. Have students complete activities in which they have to evaluate, rather than complete, assignments.**

Another activity to promote self-evaluation is to

give students assignments that are already completed (for example, other students' answers to a set of questions from a short story). The student's task, similar in tone to peer editing in the "process writing" curricula, is to read the responses and rate or score them on some sort of scale of quality (not just right or wrong). This encourages students to recognize a range of responses as "correct" (see #5). It also encourages self-evaluation (see #8). The articles listed for activities number 5, 7, and 9 are applicable here as well.

**10. Over time, help students learn that they must vary their reading strategies to meet the demands of different texts, purposes, and expectations.**
Good readers are flexible. Sometimes they read with painstaking care so as not to miss a single nuance in a poem; at other times they skim rapidly through a whole chapter looking for a quote, an answer to a factual question, or a clue to help them with an inference. Sometimes they reread a whole section after realizing that their first reading yielded little, if any, comprehension. They even know how social context influences text interpretation; for example, their rendition of the theme of a short story is probably quite different in a literature class discussion versus a casual conversation in the school cafeteria. Articles listed under activities 2, 5, 7 and 9 are applicable here as well.

**11. Encourage students to discuss and monitor their reading habits and attitudes. Students need to develop a bank of positive experiences with reading.**
Such experiences can bolster their confidence so that they can persevere in the face of difficult tasks. This is true for both in-school and out-of-school activities. We need to openly discuss their attitudes and reactions toward reading as a voluntary activity and toward the assignments we require them to do in the name of reading. [3, 7, 10, 11, 20, 24, 28, 32, 42, 59, 70]

## Adapting Curriculum to an Interactive Approach

Many existing school curricula are loosely built on an interactive model of reading programs, as are many of the recent editions of basal programs and most of the locally developed literature-based programs. Regardless of the philosophy of the program, however, there are some simple adaptations that can be made to promote the interactive quality of the program. Here are some examples of ideas presented in conversations with Illinois educators.

1. Adapt selection questions (for both discussions and assignments) and end-of-unit or end-of-level tests so that they have more than one right answer. In this way students learn that the more-than-one answer phenomenon applies to written activities as well as discussions.

2. Supplement basal passage questions to include questions that encourage the application or comparison of information across selections or topics.

3. Use comprehension and strategy development as criteria in selecting (and rejecting) activities proposed in manuals.

4. Use responses to literature, summarizing, predicting, and other writing activities as alternatives to fill-in-the-blank seatwork.

5. Extend comprehension strategy lessons beyond the workbook page by working with students as they apply the lessons to real texts, rather than workbook "snippets."

6. As an alternative comprehension activity, have students write comprehension questions for their classmates with multiple correct answers.

## Frequently Asked Questions

This section responds to five of the questions most frequently asked at workshops and in correspondence.

**Is this a timed test?**
While there is a time limit, there is ample time to read each of the passages at a normal rate and answer the accompanying questions.

**How are the items scored?**
The procedures for item scoring are complex because of the use of more than one right answer. A description of the scoring procedures



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is presented in the Appendix. The point to remember is that students receive partial credit for each correct response on the three keyed sections of the assessment: topic familiarity, constructing meaning, and reading strategies. Credit is deducted for the selection of each incorrect response.

**Is there a penalty for guessing on this test?**
Students are rewarded for matching the key (selecting correct responses and not selecting unkeyed or incorrect responses). Since guessing will yield mismatches with the key, it is penalized.

**How are the answer keys developed?**
The item writers develop tentative answer keys when they write the items. Subsequently, the items are taken by students on grade level and at the next highest grade level as well as by pre- and in-service teachers. If the test and data review reveal discrepancies between the tentative key and the preferred responses from these samples, then the item or the answer key is revised accordingly.

**Will my school's scores be compared with other schools' and districts' scores?**
All schools and districts in the state receive a score report which shows their comparison score band and "Average Constructing Meaning Score." This information allows for comparisons across schools and districts. The constructing meaning scale score and comparison score band are based solely on students' responses to the constructing meaning or comprehension questions which follow the passage they read. This score is NOT adjusted or changed to reflect students' performance on the topic familiarity or reading strategies sections. No comparative information is reported on these two sections.



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**Reading Passage**

# THE RIGHT KIND OF HOUSE

Henry Slesar

The red convertible that stopped in front of Aaron Hacker's real estate office had a New York license plate. The car's owner was new to Ivy Corners.

The fat man got out of the car and headed for the office. In the heat, perspiration had soaked through the fabric of his lightweight suit. He might have been 50. His face was flushed, but the narrow eyes remained clear and frosty-cold.

He nodded at Aaron. "Mr. Hacker?"

"Yes, sir." Aaron smiled. "What can I do for you, Mr. ____"

"Waterbury," the man said. "I don't have much time. Suppose we get right down to business."

"Suits me, Mr. Waterbury. Was there any place in particular you were interested in?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. A house at the edge of town, across the way from an old building."

"Was it a house with pillars?"

"That's the place. I thought I saw a 'for sale' sign."

Aaron chuckled dryly. "Yep, we got it listed all right." He flipped over a loose-leaf book and pointed to a typewritten sheet:

160-year-old house. 8 rooms, two baths, automatic oil furnace. Large porches, trees. Near shopping, schools. $75,000.

"Still interested?"

The man stirred uncomfortably. "Why not? Something wrong with it?"

"Well," Aaron said, "I keep the listing on my books just for the sake of old Sadie Grimes. The place just ain't worth the kind of money she's asking. It's not one of those solid-as-a-rock old houses. I mean it's real old. Never been de-termited. Some of the beams will be going in a few years. Basement's full of water half the time."

"Then why does she ask so much?"

Aaron shrugged. "Sentiment maybe. Been in her family since the Revolution; something like that."

The fat man studied the floor. "That's too bad," he said. He looked up at Aaron and smiled sheepishly. "I kinda liked the place. It was--I don't know how to explain it--the right kind of house."

"It could be fixed up. A good buy at $10,000. But $75,000?" Aaron laughed. "I think I know Sadie's reasoning, though. She doesn't have much money. Her son was supporting her, doing well in the city. Then five years ago he died, and she knew that it was sensible to sell. But she couldn't bring herself to part with the old place. So she put a price tag on it so big that nobody would come near it. That eased her conscience." He shook his head sadly. "Strange world, ain't it?"

"Yes," Waterbury said distantly. Then he stood up. "Tell you what. Suppose I drive out to see her, get her to change her price?"

Waterbury drove slowly through the quiet streets. At the Grimes place he parked his car beside the rotted picket fence that faced the house like a row of disorderly sentries. The lawn was a jungle of weeds.

The woman who came to the door was short and white-haired, and the lines in her face descended toward a small, stubborn chin. She wore a heavy wool cardigan, despite the heat.

"You must be Mr. Waterbury," she said. "Aaron Hacker said you were coming. I suppose you want to come in?"

"Awfully hot out here." He chuckled.

"Well, come on in then. I've put some lemonade in the icebox."

It was dark and cool inside. The shades were drawn. They entered a square parlor with heavy, baroque furniture. The old woman sat in a rocker, folding her hands sternly.

"Well?" she asked.

The fat man cleared his throat. "Mrs. Grimes, I've just spoken with your real estate agent--"

"I know all that!" she snapped. "Aaron's a fool for letting you come here with the notion of changing my mind."

"Er-well, I don't know if that was my intention, Mrs. Grimes. I thought we'd just--talk a little."

She leaned back, and the rocker creaked. "Talk's free. Say what you like."

"Yes." He mopped his face with a white cloth. "Let me put it this way. I'm a businessman--a bachelor. I've worked for a long time and made a fair amount of money. Now I'm ready to retire--preferably somewhere quiet. I like Ivy Corners. I passed through here some years back, on my way to--er, Albany. I thought one day I might like to settle here. When I drove through your town again today and saw this house, it just seemed right for me."

"I like it, too, Mr. Waterbury. That's why I'm asking a fair price for it."

Waterbury blinked. "Fair price? You'll have to admit, Mrs. Grimes, these days a house like this shouldn't cost more than--"

"That's enough!" the old woman cried. "Mr. Waterbury, I don't want to argue with you. If you won't pay my price, then we can forget all about it."

"But, Mrs. Grimes--"

"Good day, Mr. Waterbury!"

She stood up, indicating that he was expected to do the same.

But he didn't. "Wait a moment, Mrs. Grimes," he said. "I know it's crazy, but--all right. I'll pay what you want."

She looked at him for a long moment. "Are you sure, Mr. Waterbury?"

"Positive, I've enough money. If that's the only way you'll have it, that's the way it'll be."

She smiled thinly. "I think that lemonade'll be cold enough. I'll bring you some--and then I'll tell you about this house."

He was mopping his brow again when she returned with the tray. He gulped at the frosty beverage greedily.

"This house," she said, easing back into her rocker, "has been in my family since 1802. I know it's not the most solid house in Ivy Corners. After my son Michael was born, the basement flooded, and we never seemed able to get it dry since. Aaron tells me that there are termites, too, but I love the old place. You understand?"

"Of course," Waterbury said.

"Michael's father died when Michael was nine. It was hard times on us then. Michael missed his father, perhaps even more than I. He grew up to be--well, wild is the only word that comes to mind."

The fat man clucked sympathetically.

"When he graduated from high school, he left for the city. He was full of ambition. I don't know what he did in the city. But he must have been successful--he sent me money regularly." Her eyes clouded. "I didn't see him for nine years. And when he did come home, he was in trouble. He showed up in the middle of the night, looking thin and old. He had no luggage with him except a small black suitcase. When I tried to take it from him, he almost struck me. Struck me--his own mother!"

"The next day he told me to leave the house for a few hours. He didn't explain what he wanted to do. But when I returned, I noticed that the suitcase was gone."

"That night a man came to our house. I don't know how he got in. I heard voices in Michael's room and I tried to listen at the door, to find out what sort of trouble my boy was in. But I heard only shouts and threats, and . . ."

She paused, and her shoulders sagged.

"And a shot," she continued, "A gunshot. When I went into the room, I found the bedroom window open, and the stranger gone. And Michael was on the floor--dead."

"That was five years ago. It was a while before the police told me what had happened. Michael and this other man had been involved in a crime, a serious crime. They had stolen many, many thousands of dollars. Michael had run off with that money. He hid it somewhere in this house--I still don't know where. Then the other man came looking for my son to collect his share. When he found the money gone, he killed my boy."

She looked up, "That's when I put the house up for sale at $75,000. I knew that someday my son's killer would return. Someday he would want this house at any price. All I had to do was wait until I found the man willing to pay much too much for an old lady's house."

She rocked gently.

Waterbury put down the empty glass and licked his lips, his eyes no longer focusing, his head rolling loosely on his shoulders.

"Ugh!" he said. "This lemonade is bitter!"

**Now, answer the questions about what you have read. Remember, the questions may have 1, 2 or 3 right answers, and you may look back at what you have read to help you answer the questions.**

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GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE

**REMEMBER: THERE MAY BE 1, 2, OR 3 CORRECT ANSWERS.**

3. What kind of a day was it?

   A. Wet
   B. Foggy
   C. Frosty-cold
   D. Hot
   E. Windy

4. What does the house look like?

   A. Run-down
   B. Light and airy
   C. Well built
   D. Dark
   E. Very small

5. According to the real estate agent, what is Mrs. Grimes' house worth?

   A. Less than the asking price
   B. A lot of money
   C. $10,000 and a lot of work
   D. Every penny of the asking price
   E. More than the asking price

6. How does Aaron Hacker explain Mrs. Grimes' high asking price?

   A. She feels very attached to the house.
   B. It has termites.
   C. She recently had it fixed up with a new kitchen and new furniture in all the rooms.
   D. She wants to keep people from buying the house.
   E. It eases her conscience to try to sell it, even though she knows no one will buy it.

7. What reason does Mr. Waterbury give to Mr. Hacker for wanting the house?

   A. It has a big basement.
   B. Mr. Waterbury has a big family.
   C. It seems right for Mr. Waterbury.
   D. Mr. Waterbury likes basements with water in them.
   E. Mr. Waterbury used to live in a house just like it.

8. In the story it says that it was <u>sensible</u> for Mrs. Grimes to sell her house. Which of these things are also sensible things to do?

   A. Finishing your homework
   B. Eating balanced meals
   C. Cheating on a test
   D. Going to bed at 2:00 a.m.
   E. Exercising regularly

9. Before Mrs. Grimes went to get the lemonade, she made sure that

   A. Mr. Waterbury did not mind the termites.
   B. Mr. Waterbury was at least mildly interested in the house.
   C. Mr. Waterbury said that he knew Michael.
   D. Mr. Waterbury said that he was sure that he was willing to pay $75,000.
   E. Mr. Waterbury was good and thirsty.

10. Why had the stranger come to the house five years earlier?

    A. To leave a suitcase
    B. To strike Mrs. Grimes
    C. To get money
    D. To buy the house
    E. To kill Michael

11. Mr. Waterbury comments about the taste of the lemonade just after the author tells us that Mr. Waterbury's eyes are out of focus and his head is reeling. Mr. Waterbury's comment lets us know that

    A. Mrs. Grimes is not good at making lemonade.
    B. the heat is getting to Mr. Waterbury.
    C. Mrs. Grimes put too much sugar in the lemonade.
    D. Mr. Waterbury has been poisoned.
    E. Mr. Hacker will arrive with the police at any moment.

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**REMEMBER: THERE MAY BE 1, 2, OR 3 CORRECT ANSWERS.**

12. Which of these sentences accurately describe the relationship between Michael and his mother, Mrs. Grimes?

    A. They hated one another.
    B. His early generosity later turned to anger and thoughtlessness.
    C. She remained loyal to him after his cruel treatment of her and even after his death.
    D. He never stopped showing his love for her.
    E. Michael had been difficult for her to deal with after her husband died.

13. Mrs. Grimes' high asking price turned out to be

    A. a good way to make money.
    B. a trap for the killer.
    C. an omen for Mr. Waterbury.
    D. her way of seeking revenge.
    E. a silly idea.

14. Why was Mr. Waterbury careful not to appear too eager to buy the house when he first met with Mr. Hacker and Mrs. Grimes?

    A. He did not want to appear to be silly.
    B. He did not want to arouse suspicion.
    C. He wanted to get the price down.
    D. He was anxious to get rid of the termites.
    E. He wasn't sure that he wanted to buy the house.

15. What characteristics describe Mrs. Grimes?

    A. Silly
    B. Shrewd
    C. Impulsive
    D. Patient
    E. Vengeful

16. How could Mrs. Grimes' plot to catch Michael's killer be described?

    A. Humorous
    B. Clever
    C. Friendly
    D. Ingenious
    E. Merciful

17. If the story were to continue, what would happen to Mrs. Grimes?

    A. She would be arrested by the police.
    B. She would be convicted of murder.
    C. She would give Mr. Waterbury the money.
    D. She would sell the house.
    E. She would marry Mr. Hacker.

18. You have just read "The Right Kind of House." However, some of your classmates have not read it. Which of these would help you to tell your classmates what the story is mainly about?

    A. "It is about the right kind of house."
    B. "It is about a fifty-year-old man who wanted to buy an old house that was for sale. It had been in a flood once and was famous. The man talked to the owner."
    C. "It is about how a man learns the hard lesson that crime never pays--it always catches up with you."
    D. "It is about an old house that a lady was selling for a lot of money. It had eight rooms and a gas furnace. A fat man asked a real estate agent about buying the house after he saw the 'For Sale' sign."
    E. "It is about a man who is interested in buying a house for more money than it's worth. When he offers to pay the price, the owner knows that she has caught her son's killer. She had been waiting to find him so that she could avenge her son's death."

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19. Someone asks you, **"What did Mr. Waterbury say to Mrs. Grimes to show her he had intentions to buy her house?"** What could help you find the answer?

A. Rereading the first sentence of every paragraph.
B. Rereading the part of the story where Mr. Waterbury and Mrs. Grimes are talking in the parlor.
C. Looking up the meaning of the words in the title that you don't know.
D. Rereading all the words you don't know.
E. Rereading the part of the story where Mrs. Grimes tells Mr. Waterbury about her son Michael.

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## ANSWER KEY

**Grade 8 Title: The Right Kind of House**

**Topic Familiarity**

1. AB
2. CD

**Constructing Meaning**

3. D
4. AD
5. AC
6. ADE
7. C
8. ABE
9. D
10. CE
11. D
12. BCE
13. BD
14. B
15. BDE
16. BD
17. AB

**Reading Strategies**

18. CE
19. B